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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSM-03 ACDA-12 HA-05
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00
/093 W
----------103465 202019Z /42
O 181915Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1358
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 2308

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, PBOR, IS
SUBJECT: SPECIAL CABINET DISCUSSION OF SETTLEMENTS POLICY

1. SUMMARY: THE CABINET HELD A SPECIAL SESSION FEBRUARY 20 TO DISCUSS ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS POLICY. THE DISCUSSION WAS NOT CONCLUDED AND WILL BE CONTINUED AT NEXT SUNDAY'S REGULAR MEETING. MOST OBSERVERS SEE THE SESSION AS THE OUTCOME OF THE GROWING DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN SHARON AND WEIZMAN ON THIS SUBJECT. BEGIN'S TACTICAL POSITION IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR BUT HE IS KNOWN TO BE TROUBLED BY THE APPEARANCE OF CABINET DISUNITY ON THIS SUBJECT. END SUMMARY.

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2. AMID INCREASING REPORTS OF DISSENSION IN THE CABINET-- AND ESPECIALLY BETWEEN MINISTER OF DEFENSE WEIZMAN AND AG-CRICULTURE MINISTER SHARON -- OVER THE QUESTION OF GOI SET-TLEMENTS POLICY, THE CABINET MET TODAY FOR A SPECIAL SESSION DEVOTED TO THE QUESTION. THE SESSION LASTED FIVE AND ONE-HALF HOURS AND THE CABINET SAT AS THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE FOR SE-CURITY AFFAIRS. A SHORT ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE CONCLUSION OF

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THE MEETING SAID MERELY THAT THE QUESTION OF SETTLEMENTS
WAS DISCUSSED, THE DISCUSSION WAS NOT CONCLUDED, AND
THE DISCUSSION WOULD CONTINUE NEXT SUNDAY. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN
DECLINED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AND SAID ONLY THAT THE SESSION
HAD BEEN NECESSARY BECAUSE POLITICAL PROBLEMS HAD ACCUMULATED
REGARDING SETTLEMENTS. HE ADMITTED THAT THERE WERE SOME
DIFFERENCES OF OPINION IN THE CABINET BUT SAID HE HOPED
THE END OF THE DEBATE NEXT SUNDAY WOULD FIND THE AGREEMENT OF
ALL CABINET MEMBERS.

3. BECAUSE TODAY'S SESSION WAS HELD AS A MINISTERIAL COM-
MITTEE (AS WAS YESTERDAY'S REGULAR SESSION WHICH HEARD FOREIGN
MINISTER DAYAN'S REPORT ON HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON), IT WILL
BE DIFFICULT TO GET MANY DETAILS OF THE DISCUSSION AND THE COM-
MENTS OF VARIOUS MINISTERS. FOR EXAMPLE, ALL PRESS ARTICLES
AND COMMENTARIES MUST BE SUBMITTED FOR MILITARY CENSORSHIP
BECAUSE THE DISCUSSION WAS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SECURITY
COMMITTEE. HOWEVER, THE FOLLOWING IS OUR INITIAL ANALYSIS OF
THE MEETING AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS.

4. FIRST, IT IS OF SOME INTEREST TO NOTE THAT IT IS NOT
CLEAR WHO REQUESTED THE SESSION. OBSERVERS AGREE THAT IT
WOULD LIKELY HAVE BEEN SHARON, WEIZMAN OR BEGIN BUT DO NOT
AGREE WHICH OF THE THREE. WE ARE SOMEWHAT INCLINED TO TAKE
THE PRIME MINISTER AT HIS WORD WHEN HE SAID THERE WERE DIF-
FERENCES AMONG MINISTERS ON THIS SUBJECT AND HE FELT IT WAS
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TIME TO TRY TO REACH AGREEMENT. IN ANY CASE, THE MEETING
TODAY WAS RATHER POORLY PREPARED AND SOME MINISTERS COMPLAINED
IT HAD NOT BEEN MADE CLEAR TO THEM HOW THE DISCUSSION WAS TO
BE HANDLED.

5. SECOND, IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT THE MEETING REPRE-
SENTS THE BEGINNING OF A SHOWDOWN BETWEEN SHARON AND WEIZMAN.
SHARON FAVORS CONTINUING NEW SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN THE OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES WHILE WEIZMAN CLEARLY WANTS NO FURTHER NEW ACTIVITY
DURING NEGOTIATIONS WITH EGYPT. WEIZMAN HAD SCORED A MINOR
VICTORY A FEW WEEKS AGO WITH THE ORDER TO HALT FURTHER AC-
TIVITY IN RAFAH (SEE TEL AVIV 2110) AND IS KNOWN TO FEEL SHARON
HAD EXCEEDED THE CABINET'S DECISIONS THERE.

6. THE LINEUP OF OTHERMINISTERS IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR. EHR-
LICH HAS SAID HE WOULD SUPPORT WEIZMAN WHILE HAMMER SUPPORTS
SHARON. OTHER MINISTERS ARE TO BE FOUND, WITH VARIOUS NUANCES,
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THESE TWO EXTREMES. SOME INCLINE TOWARD
WEIZMAN'S POSITION AND SUPPORT SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY
BUT NO NEW SETTLEMENTS NOW. OTHER INCLINE TOWARD SHARON
AND SAY THERE SHOULD BE CONTINUING NEW ACTIVITY BUT WITHOUT
PUBLICITY. DAYAN, WITH HIS SETTLEMENT ORIENTATION, IS PROB-

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ABLY CLOSER TO SHARON THQAN TO WEIZMAN ON THIS QUESTION, ALTHOUGH HE WOULD FAVOR GENUINE SETTLEMENTS AND NOT PHONY "AGRICULTURAL OUTPOSTS," SUCH AS SHARON WAS SETTING OUT IN THE SINAI. THE DMC MINISTERS WOULD, PREDICTABLY AGREE WITH WEIZMAN.

7. BEGIN'S POSITION IS, OF COURSE, MOST IMPORTANT BUT NOT ALTOGETHER CLEAR TO US. HE DID NOT EXPRESS HIS OPINIONS AT TODAY'S MEETING, BUT ASKED THE VIEWS OF ALL OTHER MINISTERS. WE BELIEVE HE IS PROBABLY SOMEWHAT AMBIVALENT ON THE TACTICS OF THIS ISSUE, AL-THOUGH THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT ABOUT HIS BASIC COMMITMENT TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SETTLEMENTS. HE WAS EMBARRASSED BY THE APPEAR-ANCE OF PPOR COORDINATION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT REGARDING RAFAH AND SHILOH AND WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A UNIFIED GOVERNMENTAL POSITION. HE WOULD PROBABLY NOT WANT NEGOTIATIONS TO FAIL ON
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THIS ISSUE, BUT WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO HALT NEW SETTLEMENT AC-TIVITY BECAUSE HE WOULD BE SEEN AS GIVING IN TO PRESSURE. HE IS SURE TO PUSH FOR CLOSER COORDINATION AND TIGHTER DISCIPLINE ON THIS ISSUE. HOWEVER, ANY DECISION TO REFRAIN FROM INITIATING NEW ACTIVITY WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED AND WE SHOULD EXPECT THAT SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY ALREADY COMMENCED WOULD BE CONTINUED.
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